

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Key Points:

- Native students require the support and tools to succeed in post-secondary institutions.
- Many Native students thrive in an environment that recognizes the unique cultural and holistic support that is found with tribal communities.

Tribal Colleges and Universities: Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) are a vital and essential component of education for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Currently, 37 TCU's operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 16 states serving students from over 250 federally-recognized tribes. In total, TCUs serve about 88,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs.

Tribal Colleges and Universities are public institutions accredited by independent, regional accreditation agencies, the same as all other institutions of higher learning in the United States. Currently, all TCUs offer associate degrees; 13 TCUs offer multiple bachelor's degrees, and 5 TCUs offer master's degrees.

TCUs serve many roles within the tribal community. They are not only institutions of high learning, but also provide a variety of evening, weekend, and para-professional training for tribal employees and member, along with the tribal court and justice system staff. TCUs run day care centers, Head Start programs, health nutrition education programs, community gardens, and often house the community library. In other words, TCUs are often the central gathering place for a tribal community. These institutions offer Native students the opportunity for post-secondary education surrounding by their culture and community support.

Mainstream Colleges and Universities: Institutions of higher learning within the United States are often ill-equipped to address the cultural needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students. Developed, maintained, and orchestrated in a way that mimics mainstream society, Native students who pursue higher education outside of their local communities often find themselves in a world that differs greatly from their home communities and cultural backgrounds. Not only are these institutions hard to navigate, but Native students often are first-generation college attendees and often lack the access to the appropriate services in order to successfully navigate institutions of higher learning far removed from the support of their tribal communities. Further, there is often a lack of awareness amongst faculty and administrators about the unique needs of Native students.

In 2012, only 39 percent Native students who started in 2005 as first-time, full-time students at 4-years institutions graduated, compared to 60 percent of non-Native students. In 2011, among students who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) test, 63 percent of Native 8th graders had never talked to a school counselor during 8th

grade about classes they should take in high school or about what they want to do after high school.

The road to higher education begins in primary, middle, and high school. Due to the fact that a majority of American Indian and Alaska Native students attend public schools, consideration must be made to the fact that because we are failing Native youth in their higher education support systems, they are not being given the foundational support before entering these institutions of higher learning. Forty percent of Native students will graduate without a high school diploma. Of those who do graduate, only one-third will enroll in college compared to two-thirds of their non-Native peers. “There are several reasons for the low number of Indian students in college: the lack of high school graduates; non-existing or inadequate programs and services, a lack of administrative support where the student attends college; faculty misconceptions and stereotyping; and poor student relations with the college institution and other students.” (Harrington & Harrington, 2012).